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V. MASS ORGANIZATIONS AS MEDIA OF PUBLIC INFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA

203 208 575 The Communists are fond of using the word "network" for all activities pertaining to public information and propaganda. Already discussed in this study are the news-gathering network, radio network, library and book-distribution network, the motion-picture-showing and cultural-center network. Included in the Communist term of "cultural network," however, are many mass organizations, all contributing to the over-all public information, education, and propaganda scheme.[58]

One of these organizational networks is the Sino-Russian Friendship Association. Established on October 5, 1949, in Peking, this organization expanded rapidly and by February 1952 had 64,200 large and small branches with a total membership[59] of 23,000,000. Under the over-all direction of Liu Shao-chi, whose position in the Party hierarchy is said to be second only to that of Mao Tse-tung, this association through its omnipresent branches organizes, indoctrinates, and propagandizes people of all professional strata. The daily contribution to public information and propaganda takes the form of group discussions and meetings.

58. A list of 96 such national mass organizations is found in People's Handbook, 1955, pp. 7-8.

59. People's Handbook, 1952, p. 258.

203 208 575 At these small group gatherings, Soviet theories and practices are discussed. When there is a national propaganda campaign, the association mobilizes all its branches to give concerted support to the government. These mass organizations have their own "cultural departments," which in reality are information and propaganda units. Altogether the "cultural network" of an average size hsien may easily contain 4,000 units, with over 30,000 people actively participating.[60] When applied to cities like Shanghai and Nanking in East China, these figures are but moderate estimates.

V. PERSONAL CONTACT

203 208 Any study of public information and propaganda in Communist China would be greatly amiss if it discounted the importance of personal contact. This particular medium of communication is essential to the Communist public information and propaganda scheme, and it works most effectively in a country like China where 80 per cent of the population is illiterate.

The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, on January 1, 1951, issued a directive on the "Establishment of a Propaganda Network Aimed at the Masses." The directive points out that" (a) in the past propaganda work has been neglected; no permanent

60. Chao Ts'ung, op. cit., p. 36.

•203 208 personnel had been assigned to conduct person-to-person propaganda, counteracting rumors and clarifying government policies; (b) all Party branches henceforth will assign propaganda officers; all guiding agencies in the Party will appoint reporting officers; enthusiastic activists, although non-Party members, may also be enlisted as propaganda officers; (c) under the direction of the Party, propaganda officers will conduct propaganda through personal contact, and will report on the people's reaction and response; (d) the reporting officers, all responsible Party members serving at the various Party and government agencies, will make political reports to mass assemblies at least once every two months. Their reports are subject to clearance by Party authorities.[61]

Execution of the foregoing directive in East China resulted in the registration of 650,000 propaganda officers by the end of 1951. The reporting officers during the same period gave political talks to some 19,790,000 people.[62] It was admitted by the same Communist source, however, that "some of these propaganda officers were not sufficiently effective."

In the summer of 1953, Communist authorities moved to strengthen the system of

61. Chien-li Hsüan-ch'uan-wang [Establishing a Propaganda Network], Shanghai, Hua-tung jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1951, pp. 1-6.

62. People's Handbook, 1952, p. 437.

personal propaganda by establishing what might be described as "coaching stations" for propaganda officers. At these stations propaganda officers met twice a month, each session lasting about two hours. With the help of well-seasoned agitators acting as coaches, the propaganda officers received on-the-spot instructions on how to operate most effectively. In June 1953 over 50 per cent of the sub-districts and hsiang in East China had such stations in operation.[63]

Anti-Communist sources conclude that the establishment of such "coaching stations" is a testimony to the collapse of the Communist person-to-person propaganda system.[64] Communist reports, on the other hand, claim that propaganda and reporting officers have come to be regarded by the people as "information bureaus," "thought doctors," and "messengers of Chairman Mao Tse-tung." If these titles reflect the popular conception of these propaganda officers, then there is reason to believe the claim that personal contact has exerted decisive influence on the masses in the movements to suppress counterrevolutionaries, carry out land reform, "Resist-America-Aid-Korea," and increase industrial and agricultural production.[65]

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63. Chin Ta-k'ai "Chung-kung Hsüan-ch'uan-wang Ti Fa-chan Chi Ch'i P'o-ch'an" ["The Development and Collapse of the Chinese Communist Propaganda Network"], in China Weekly, No. 70, May 3, 1954, p. 12.

64. Ibid.

65. People's Handbook, 1952, pp. 436-37.

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203 208 The significance of the part played by personal contact in the Communist propaganda scheme is well described in a People's Daily editorial. The Party had been relying on separate propaganda campaigns to achieve its goals, the editorial said, and Party members had thought constant personal contact not essential to the success of propaganda. Now everyone admits that "propaganda officers are trail-blazers without whom no work can be undertaken."[66]

VII. CONCLUSION

A. The Extent of the System

208 The Communist propaganda machine, which uses all types of public-information media, is co-ordinated with mechanical precision. The highest policy-making body in the Party hierarchy decides on the issues to be propagandized; an order from this body is enough to start a chain reaction. Take the 1951 movement to "suppress counterrevolutionaries," for example: the decision was made in Peking in February 1951. To borrow a cliche from the Communists, the movement "spread like a forest fire," and by October of the same year, all the tools of propaganda had been brought into play. Major newspapers, radio stations,

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66. People's Daily, Peking, January 1, 1, 1952, p. 3.